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### The Endless Opportunities and Benefits of Inclusion

The inclusion of people with disabilities is one of the most controversial issues that our world faces today. I have learned that this affects all of us in ways that people do not always comprehend. This means that by choosing not to acknowledge people with disabilities, we are losing some of life's most precious opportunities and chances for growth. Webster's Dictionary defines inclusion as "the act of including or the state of being included". I believe that there are more choices in life that come from this one simple word. We are not only giving people with disabilities acknowledgement and praise, but we are giving everyone the sense of life that all people deserve.

Currently, I'm enrolled in a class called *Social Skills*, which teaches general education students to work with learning disabled and cognitively impaired students. General education students, called cadet teachers, partner with special education students to help them improve their social skills. Also, we are privileged to have "Stepping Out" partners which engage us all in an after school activity in the community. Some examples would be to go out to eat at a dining-in restaurant, go shopping, or simply go to a sporting event. Although I'm not yet an expert in the areas of disabilities, I realize I have learned a great deal about the benefits of inclusion for people with, and without disabilities. Including our special education students in the general education population is so very vital to their development, as it is to our very own.

Inclusion is not just a dilemma that we face today, but we have seen it in our past as well. With the equal rights movements, our country has grown, developed, and flourished into a place where dreams can come true. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment of our Constitution was

ratified, prohibiting slavery, and involuntary servitude. Our newly elected, President Barack Obama, is an example of how inclusion can help people blossom into their full potential.

With all of this said, I'd like to paint a picture for you: imagine an entire school, no... an entire population where cognitively impaired, learning disabled, and general education students are united as one. All races, ethnicities, and variations of minds are combined as a group, instead of different "clicks" that exclude some people. There's not one single person who is left out. As the State of Missouri Governor's Council on Disability states, "Everyone wants to be included," I believe this whole-heartedly and believe that with classes like *Social Skills*, we may all achieve a higher level of equality. The benefits of inclusion are endless. We can make a difference and we can choose to include everyone. If we do this, we will have the privileged opportunity to see everyone grow; not just physically, and mentally, but emotionally as well.